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THE CASE

OF THE

HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY.

IN

A LETTER

TO

LORD PALMERSTON.

BY

ANDREW FREEPORT.

LONDON:

EDWARD STANFORD, 6, CHARING CROSS.

1857.

5624

TO

THE RIGHT HONORABLE

LORD PALMERSTON.

MY LORD,

It is generally a thankless office to direct the attention of Governments to subjects that are not in accordance with their own views, and more particularly so to call the attention of the First Minister of the Crown to national evils, if the exposé do not coincide with his own political sentiments. But when the rights of the Nation are assailed, the means of redress are in the power of the People, who have a constitutional claim on Parliament to relieve their grievances.

It is this privilege that induces me to address your Lordship.

How did it happen, my Lord, that the principal Members of the Government seemed so passive, when the late discussions took place in the House of Commons, on the renewal of the Charter of the Hudson's Bay Company? Did it not occur to you that the renewal of it would be an infringement of the rights of the people, or were you silent in deference to the opinions entertained by Mr. Labouchere?

It cannot be that Mr. Labouchere is seeking to obtain private or political influence by acquiescing in, or giving a partial advocacy to, the interests of the Company, for such a course is derogatory to the general opinion entertained of his political views, although his late remarks

on this subject would lead to that conclusion. Surely he does not imagine that Lord Grey's Colonial administration in 1849 was so pre-eminent in virtue as to deserve imitation, neither can he be ignorant that, the renewal of an obsolete Charter, to the detriment of the Nation, would be an act of injustice.

This question should not be considered one of faction, or of party, or of individual right, neither should it be hurried unnecessarily through Parliament, for the Common Right of the Nation is interested in it.

It cannot be said, that British territories occupying an area one-third larger than the whole of Europe, are too insignificant for the calm and mature deliberation of Government; neither should the rights of the Crown again be allowed to succumb to the benefit of a few private individuals.

The country is at length cognisant of the injustice done in 1849, and the people are not again disposed to suffer an invasion of their rights, even though their resistance lead to the fall of a Ministry.

I trust it is only necessary to call the attention of your Lordship to this subject, so that when it is again introduced to Parliament, it may derive that support, which is consistent with *the rights of the Crown, the claims of the Nation, and the freedom of Commerce.*

I am,

MY LORD,

Your Lordship's well-wisher,

ANDREW FREEPORT.

LONDON, 18TH MAY, 1857.

THE
GOVERNMENT
AND THE
HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY.

THE discussions that lately took place in Parliament on the propriety of renewing a Charter granted to the Hudson's Bay Company by King Charles the Second, in the year 1670, seemed to develop facts and give rise to startling apprehensions, with which the public mind was not familiar. Few persons appeared to know that such a Charter was even in existence, and nearly all who have read the debates on the subject seem at a loss to imagine how Government, acting upon the constitutional politics of the day, could justify the supposition that the renewal of a Charter would be tolerated, that is so diametrically opposed to the interest of every British subject.

The Charter granted by King Charles to the Hudson's Bay Company is one of those old obsolete Charters, which gives them rights and immunities that are incompatible with the policy and feelings of the present day, and in direct contravention to all the principles of *independent Commerce and Free Trade*.

It appears that the Directors of the Hudson's Bay Company are endeavouring to cajole the Government, into granting them a renewal of this Charter, which expires in 1859, and for that purpose a Committee of the House of Commons was lately appointed to enquire into the facts relating thereto. But as this subject, which is one of great importance to the British nation, must shortly be brought again before the

House of Commons, the following statements and observations have been put together, with the hope of shewing, what are the points really deserving of attention and consideration, in relation to the question of how the Hudson's Bay Company ought to be dealt with by Parliament.

Now, amongst the practically important questions, surely that, which it seems is to be referred to the judicial Committee of the Privy Council, is not one. It cannot be worth the time or attention of any one to discuss whether the Crown has a right to delegate, by a Charter, to a body of its subjects, the soil and freehold in some millions of square miles of territory, with power to make laws, to levy war and make peace with all nations, not being Christians, and to exclude all persons from trading within such territory, at pleasure.

Are the Ministry ignorant that Charles the Second's Charter to the East India Company, purported to convey to them just the same tremendous powers—powers which Parliament long ago began to mould into a more moderate and national form, casting away all idle speculations on the prerogative. Suppose the lawyers to have settled, ever so satisfactorily to themselves, the power of the Crown, that is, of the Minister of the day, to grant in perpetuity any portion of the national territory, with jurisdiction, &c., and all other rights of sovereignty, with exclusive trade, still, for the nation, the real question to be decided is, *shall this be law any longer?* Surely any enquiry into the validity of this Charter must needs turn out as unprofitable, except for the purpose of diverting attention from the reality, as would be an enquiry, whether the ordinance of Edward the Third in the year 1337, that none should wear furs who had not an income of £100 a year, was legal or not.

In the society of every-day life, with its frivolity, etc., perhaps the most soporific of subjects for conversation is the Colonies. But so ill-informed, and so little desirous of information are people in general, respecting the vast territories in North America which bear the British name, of which some *three millions of square miles* are under the rule of this Company, that any person who in private seeks to attach

an interest, or even to arrest attention to such topics, may well look out for failure.

But in the Great Council, on whose wisdom and prudence depends so deeply, the weal or woe of the dependencies of England, there should prevail far other views. A lively sense of their arduous duty and unspeakable responsibility should be felt by each member of the body—the picked men of twenty-seven millions! There should be an earnest desire to become acquainted with the facts, a full knowledge and profound consideration of which can alone fit them, for the conscientious discharge of those high duties, which they have sought the opportunity, and the charge, and honor of performing.

Alas for public virtue! When, in 1849, Lord Lincoln pressed this subject on the House of Commons, shewing from our early colonial history how Virginia, Massachusetts, New England, indeed all our early possessions in North America, had languished so long as their affairs were managed by absentee proprietary bodies, springing up and flourishing only when those Companies were dissolved; shewing, too, that of all the Companies that had ever exercised territorial power, the Hudson's Bay Company was the worst qualified to develop the resources of a country, and had in fact done the least, for it had done nothing towards performing, or even commencing the performance of, the great duty with which it was charged, viz., of enlightening, civilizing, and ameliorating the condition of the numerous tribes, whose destinies are in its hands; shewing its powers of government to be absolute, unfettered by a provision for the liberty of the subject; that it was despotic, secret, irresponsible:—all failed to stir the lazy apathy of the men whom England trusted with the guardianship of her interests and honor—*Her Majesty's faithful Commons were counted out.* But this was not all, for shortly afterwards Lord Grey, being then Colonial Minister, found no difficulty in getting the assent of Parliament to an arrangement, by which the valuable possession of Vancouver's Island was added, with large powers, to the then existing territories of the Company.

This thing, it is hoped, will not happen again, although the Honorable Edward Ellice (who is Lord Grey's brother-in-law) is still reported to be a large proprietor, deeply interested in the concerns of the Company; and, strange to say, his son (who is a Director of the Company) has again been appointed a member of the Committee, to whom the House of Commons has referred the investigation of the conduct and proceedings of the Company, thus being at once judge and party in the trial.

But a new Parliament is assembled, and it is to be hoped that few honorable Members will be found ready to sanction, by their votes, a repetition or imitation of the measures of 1849, provided only that they can be awakened to the merits of the question.

This Company trades in Furs and Peltries of all kinds, obtained from the Indian tribes; who, to the number, Mr. Ellice states, of about 300,000, roam over their immense territories. The mode of traffic is this. At points in the rivers throughout the country are established Posts, as they are called, which are more or less fortified places, all provided with ample munitions of war, some with cannon, whereto the natives bring the skins for sale. On these a value is fixed by the "gentleman in charge" of the place, and the price is paid in wooden counters, no coined money being allowed to circulate. In another room are exposed for sale a stock of blankets, cloth, guns, knives, pots, &c. &c., and for such of these things as he desires the simple savage pays his counters, until they are exhausted, the result being a profit on the goods thus bartered of at least two hundred per cent. to the Company, as appears from the evidence of an old employè of theirs, given before the late Committee. A more effective device for securing an absolute grinding monopoly was never invented.

Have the Company during the 180 years of their sway, formed any plan, or taken any steps to induce these wretched people, the instruments of their enormous gains, to adopt a more settled and comfortable mode of life? Have they sought to introduce some knowledge of agriculture, supplied seeds,

tools, or animals? Above all, has any one measure been adopted for improving their moral condition, or for educating their children in any one instance? To all this they give no answer. The Company indeed talk a good deal of the Missionaries whom they have "introduced" among the Salteaux Indians, but this curiously vague phrase must not be understood as though the Company paid or provided these men. They were sent out and supported by the Church Missionary society, and the Wesleyan Missionary society. Even at the colony of Red River, originally founded by Lord Selkirk, who brought over a body of Highlanders and Orkney men to people it, and where the Company's old and retired servants mostly settle with their families; forming, with the half castes, a population of about 5000 persons, consisting of Roman Catholics and Protestants; the Company, though liberal enough to make "an allowance" to the Romish ecclesiastics, are not liberal enough to enable them to dispense with the necessity of exacting tithes, "amounting to the 26th bushel of all kinds of grain."

As to the charges of the Protestant worship, "they are defrayed partly by the Company and partly by the Church Missionary society." The charges of education, these are the statements of Sir George Simpson we are quoting: "as to four-fifths of them fall upon the Church Missionary society, the remaining fifth is borne by such individual parents, as are able and willing to spare fifteen shillings a year for the moral and intellectual culture of the child." It was to the exertions, not of the Company, but of Dr. Mountain, the Bishop of Quebec, that the scattered inhabitants of the Hudson's Bay territories are indebted, for the appointment of a Bishop. Hearing of the increasing number of the inhabitants of the settlement, and of their spiritual destitution, he undertook the long and adventurous journey to Red River, and the appointment of Dr. Anderson was the result.

Then Mr. Labouchere tells us "the Company has at its head gentlemen of the highest character and sagacity residing in London." In 1821, when, with the sanction of Parliament,

the Company obtained a lease for 21 years (renewed for a like period in 1842), of an additional territory, did they or did they not bind themselves "to make due provision for the civilization and moral and religious improvement of the natives?" Now there is no evidence to be found of more having been done by the Company or its Directors during 36 years to redeem the above-stated pledge—there is evidence to the contrary, and notwithstanding the honeysuckle phrases of Mr. Labouchere, there are persons who are beginning to doubt the high character of a Director, who, as such, sanctions breaches of duty and obligation, which, if committed in private life, would earn nothing but reprobation and contempt.

It appears to be an old habit of this body to slip the yoke of obligation. The Charter of 1670 they loudly declare is valid and legal: in that case its obligations are binding on them. Now, the principal condition on which the Charter was originally granted bound them to make exertions for the discovery of the North-West Passage. And Mr. Gladstone plainly declared, "All those expeditions which have been made by the adventurous navigators of England during the nineteenth century, at an enormous cost to the country, ought by right to have been paid out of the revenues of the Hudson's Bay Company."

But the real questions are incomparably more weighty than the character and sagacity of any knot of money makers. The character really involved, is the character of the people of England for justice and humanity; the sagacity required, is that of the imperial policy, which shall administer these vast regions for the best advantage of ourselves, *i. e.* of the nation at large, and of mankind in general. Is the whole upper section of the American Continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, to be left in the hands of these men, locked up from access to the energy and capital of English colonists, in order that fur animals may increase and multiply, and until the Americans, who are now crowding into the adjoining territory of Minnesota, may by and by swarm over the boundary line, and without impediment occupy, and annex, the vacant domain at their pleasure?

No doubt the Company's tone at present is to represent the country as being unfit for colonization, much of the land being (as they say) incapable of cultivation, and the climate such as no one would encounter who was not paid for it. Whilst this is their language of to-day, it is interesting to notice the difference of expression that exists in the same mind, when it narrates for historical information in 1847, and when it speaks for an interested object in 1857.

In 1841 Sir George Simpson, (who is the Governor-in-Chief of the Hudson's Bay Company,) travelled across their dominions, and in his "Journey round the World," published in 1847, whilst describing his journey from Montreal to Red River, he frequently breaks out in admiration of the splendid country through which he passed. In Vol. I, page 36, he speaks of the river being studded with isles not less fertile and lovely than its banks, and many a spot reminded them of the rich and quiet scenery of England—with violets, roses, and many other wild flowers spangling the paths, while the currant, gooseberry, raspberry, plum, cherry, and even the vine grew in abundance. And it would be difficult to describe a country in more glowing colors than is given in his narrative at pages 45 and 46, where he states "the river which empties Lac la Pluie into the lake of the woods, is, in more than one respect, decidedly the finest stream on the whole route. From Fort Frances downward, a stretch of nearly one hundred miles, it is not interrupted by a single impediment, while yet the current is not strong enough materially to retard an ascending traveller. Nor are the banks less favourable to agriculture than the waters themselves to navigation, resembling, in some measure, those of the Thames near Richmond. From the very brink of the river there rises a gentle slope of green sward, crowned in many places with a plentiful growth of birch, poplar, beech, elm, and oak."

So beautiful is the scenery in the vicinity of Lac la Pluie, that Sir George breaks forth in prophetic extacy, and writes: "Is it too much for the eye of philanthropy to discern, through

the vista of futurity, this noble stream, connecting, as it does, the fertile shores of two spacious lakes, with crowded steam-boats in its bosom, and populous towns on its borders?" Speaking afterwards of the Lake of the Woods, he says: "though the shores of this sheet of water are more rocky than those of Lac la Pluie, yet they are very fertile, producing the rice already mentioned in abundance, and bringing maize to perfection. The lake is also literally studded with woody islands, from which it has doubtless derived its name; and these islands, being exempted from nocturnal frosts, which exist chiefly in the neighbourhood of swamps, are better adapted than the main land for cultivation."

At page 53, speaking of the Colony at Red River settlement, he says, "the soil proved rich and productive, and the plough met with no obstruction; the usual American step necessarily taken for clearing away the forest, previous to tilling the land, was not required. At page 55, it is stated, "the soil at Red River settlement is a black mould of considerable depth, which, when first tilled, produces extraordinary crops, as much on some occasions as forty returns of wheat; and, even after twenty successive years of cultivation, without the relief of manure, or of fallow, or of green crop, it still yields from fifteen to twenty-five bushels per acre. The wheat produced is plump and heavy; there are also large quantities of grain of all kinds, besides beef, mutton, pork, butter, cheese, and wool in abundance."

Although subject to heavy snow falls and occasional spring floodings, it does not seem more inclement than some of the counties in the North of England.

At page 84, he speaks of the Saskatchewan being a quarter of a mile wide, and navigable for boats upwards of 700 miles in a direct line; and at page 85, he describes animal food so abundant as to be wasted by the Indians from mere wantonness. At page 86, "their route lay over a hilly country, so picturesque in its character, that almost every commanding position presented the elements of an interesting panorama."

At page 90, he speaks of seeing buffaloes to the number of 5000, and at page 91, says "provisions were so abundant that after taking the tongues they left the carcasses to the mercy of the wolves." At page 101, speaking of Edmonton, he says "the vicinity is rich in mineral productions; a seam of coal, about ten feet in depth, can be traced for a very considerable distance along both sides of the river. At page 102 the tribes of the Saskatchewan District are given as numbering 16,730 souls, and Sir George goes on to say, "Small as this census is for a territory at least as large as England, the force of the Company's servants is infinitely smaller;" and then he relates how cleverly one of their people, with the quickness of thought, sheathed a dagger in the heart of an Indian.

At page 174, speaking of the Company's dairy at Willamette, he says "this beautiful Island is fifteen miles in length by seven at its greatest breadth, covered with abundance of timber and the richest pasturage;" and at page 178 he describes their dairy on the Cowlitz Farm as follows: "On the Cowlitz Farm there were already about 1000 acres of land under the plough, besides a large dairy, an extensive park for horses, etc., and the crops of the season had amounted to 8 or 9000 bushels of wheat, 4000 of oats, and due proportions of barley, potatoes, etc. The other farm was on the shores of Puget Sound; and as its soil was found to be better fitted for pasturage than tillage, it had been appropriated almost exclusively to the flocks and herds, so that now, with only 200 acres of cultivated land, it possessed 6000 sheep, 1200 cattle, besides horses, pigs, etc. In addition to these two farms there was a Catholic Mission, with about 180 acres under the plough."

"The climate is propitious, while the seasons are remarkably regular. Between the beginning of April and the end of September there is a continuance of dry weather, generally warm, and often hot, the mercury having this year (1841) risen at Nisqually to 107° in the shade. March and October are unsettled and showery, and during the four months of winter there is almost constant rain, while the temperature is so mild that the sheep and cattle not only remain out of doors, but

even find fresh grass for themselves from day to day." At page 181, they arrive at Fort Nisqually, on the evening of the fourth day from Fort Vancouver, and there, it is stated, "The Sound yields plenty of fish, such as salmon, rock cod, halibut, flounders, etc.;" and at page 182 Sir George writes, "The neighbouring country, comprising the southern end of Vancouver's Island, is well adapted for cultivation; for in addition to a tolerable soil and a moderate climate, it possesses excellent harbours and abundance of timber. It will doubtless become, in time, the most valuable section of the whole coast above California."

Sir George Simpson, says, (Vol. I. page 47) that in 1841, with a company of forty persons, and many cart loads of stores and heavy goods, he travelled from Montreal to Red River in thirty-eight days, being about two thousand miles. The fact is, that the extraordinary number of rivers, navigable like the Ottawa, with boats, for hundreds of miles at a stretch, notwithstanding that in places the rapids and waterfalls render portages necessary, are adapted most materially to facilitate transport and traffic, and render possible such speed as above. But there is a material difference in the mode of transit now, through the different States, from what there was in 1841. Railroads have, and are making giant strides through the Continent of America: within about twelve months from this time a railway will be completed to Fond du Lac, the extreme north-west point of Lake Superior, which is in a direct line from New York and Montreal to Red River settlement; and about one hundred and fifty miles more of railway through the State of Minnesota, (which is sure to be opened in the course of a few years), will connect Red River settlement by rail with the whole of the Atlantic sea board.

But, independent of railways, it is not meant to say, that emigrants could command all the resources that Sir George Simpson had at his disposal, but only that where nature has done so much, it is impossible to believe, but that plenty of colonizable land is to be had with less than the average difficulty of access in the Far West of America. However, it is

sufficiently clear the colonists are not happy under the Company's rule, else why did a large body of the Scotch whom Lord Selkirk brought over, quit the settlement at Red River, after a sufficient trial, in order to begin the world again in America?

Enough has been quoted to shew the high estimation in which Sir George held those various tracts of land over which he travelled. But after carrying the imagination to those large districts which Mr. Labouchere said "*were admirably suited to the use and enjoyment of civilized man, some being rich in soil and minerals, and others, from situation being extremely valuable to commerce,*" let us see what Sir George Simpson stated in his evidence the other day before the committee of the house of Commons. Sir George is reported to have said, on the 26th February last, "*in reference to the cultivation and colonization of the territory of the Hudson's Bay Company, he had no hesitation in expressing his opinion that no part of it was fit for settlers.*" How does this comport with his previously written assertions, when neither the title, nor the renewal of the charter, was in immediate jeopardy?

A much more lengthened account of Sir George Simpson's work is here quoted than would have been deemed necessary, had he not been the principal Director and Governor-in-chief of the Hudson's Bay Company's possessions, and the witness in whom they placed their chief reliance.—He is reported to be the only Director who is familiar with all the internal workings of their machinery, and there is not a station on their territories that is not governed by his influence, nor any business conducted without his control. Therefore, he may be said to represent the Hudson's Bay Company, for all the other Directors are ciphers compared with him, as regards the business details, though they are equally cognizant of the principles on which that business is conducted.

But in addition to this narrative, written at a period when (little dreaming the time would arrive that the Charter of the Company would be discontinued) Sir George was desirous

of giving to the world a *faithful* description of the territory over which he presided, there is another account, very enlightening as regards the manner in which the Company conduct their affairs in that unobserved region.

Mr. Wm. G. N. Kingston, in his "Western Wanderings; or, a Pleasure Tour in the Canadas," published in 1856, by Chapman and Hall, alluding to the Hudson's Bay Company, gives the following account in Vol. II, pages 86 and 87.

"Amongst other subjects the Hudson's Bay Company and their principles of action came on the tapis. Their policy seems to be of the most illiberal and short-sighted character. Afraid of losing the services of the half-caste and Indian population, who now form a very considerable community in the territory given up to their sway, should they discover the high rate of wages they would be able to obtain in Canada, they jealously close, to the utmost of their power, all communication with the British provinces; nor will they allow any goods to be brought in from thence for general use, having them instead sent round in their own ships to their settlements in Hudson's Bay. Once a-year only their *bateaux* come from Montreal up the Ottawa laden with stores for their ports; but no general merchandise is conveyed by them, while their crews are trusty old voyageurs, employed always in the same service, who, from their peculiar habits, are not likely to gain any information as to the true state of affairs in the colony, or if they do, to communicate it to the population at large. The American traders of Minnesota, the new State of the Union bordering on the Hudson Bay territory, have, however, very wisely taken advantage of this *anti-free-trade system* of the Company, and, by pushing forward their own trading posts, have induced the inhabitants of the southern districts to come to them for all the goods they may require. The advantage of this trade, which has now become very considerable, has thus been entirely lost to Canada. It appears to be the belief of the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, that it is necessary for the maintenance of their monopoly, to keep the rest of the world ignorant of the real condition of their

country ; but several of their writers, while broadly asserting its inhospitable and sterile nature, have let out facts, which prove that those regions over which their hunters and trappers roam, are very far from being so unattractive as they would have the world suppose. Among other facts it is stated, that the buffalo bring forth their young in their territories at a late period of the year, while corn of various descriptions grows there in abundance ; and Sir George Simpson describes many spots as rich and fertile, and abounding in game which only exists in temperate regions. I have not his book at hand, but the point is worth looking into."

There is also a report current, and generally believed, that the Hudson's Bay Company oppose every attempt made to establish fishing stations in the excellent harbours along the British coasts of Lake Superior, which are admirably fitted for such stations, and that their agents instigate the Indians to destroy the nets, huts, boats, and barrels of the fishermen, and offer every annoyance in their power. If this be not so, who or what is it that prevents the development of the copper and iron wealth of the Canadian shore of the lake to the same extent, as both have been for some time on the American side ? This copper seems to be admitted to be some of the finest in the world. The Directors of the Company, one might have thought, would have gladly taken every means to make known this fact ; to attract thither British capital and enterprise ; to facilitate the working of the mines, and to take care their agents offered every assistance, which their experience of the country, and influence with the native tribes could suggest. Have they done this, or any part of it ?

Then, it is said to be impossible to see how the trade with the Indians is to be managed, if the mode to which they have been accustomed for so long a period be abolished. But exactly the same argument was advanced when it was proposed to put an end to the great leviathan monopoly that Parliament destroyed, viz. the exclusive tea trade of the East India Company with China. Having succeeded in putting down that, shall we allow to remain standing this, the last, and not the least odious of all the monopolies ?

If there is nothing to conceal, why the rigid secrecy which the Company exact from all their subordinates and officers? If there is no opposition to colonization, why is the Company now insisting upon the general unfitness for colonization, and the great difficulty of reaching the Red River settlement, where no clearing of forest is necessary, where the pasturage is rich and the climate salubrious, where wheat, barley, and Indian corn grow abundantly, where the rivers abound with excellent fish, and the unreclaimed lands swarm with game of all descriptions?

If, as Mr. Labouchere says, he feels bound to state, the Company are not neglectful of their duty, as "*Trustees for the British people and also for the Indian population*;" how is it that in the Colonial office a memorial has been lying unheeded since 1847, from a number of settlers and half castes at Red River, bitterly complaining of the injustice, avarice, and extortion practiced by the Company, and of their total neglect of all attempts to educate, or in any way to civilize the Indian population? Such is their notion of what their Governor, Sir George Simpson, calls "*the divine task of shedding on the natives the light of the Gospel*." It is unnecessary to say more, their own words condemn them, and surely they are not fit persons to be trusted with power, or to be compensated when deprived of it.

On perusing the different works written by various Authors, in which allusion is made to the Hudson's Bay Company, it is curious to observe that all, except those written under the auspices of the Company, agree in the injustice of their proceedings, and all arrive at a condemnatory conclusion. There is, however, a work published by a Mr. Fitzgerald, which particularly arrested my attention, and, for the sake of Justice and Humanity, I trust that all that is therein stated is not true; else the curse of God as well as man, must rest upon this Company, for the perusal of it makes the heart bleed with grief, whilst the blood boils with indignation. This work, published by Saunders, of Charing Cross, ought to be perused by every Member of Parliament, before he can be deemed competent to give a fair and just opinion on the subject.

But, independent of these, there is a work just published, called, "A Personal Narrative of the Discovery of the North-West Passage," by Alexander Armstrong, M.D., R.N., 1857, in which the author, who cannot have any interest in speaking against the Company, makes allusion to it in such a way as to deserve attention. At page 151, speaking of an Esquimaux tribe they met, that did not trade with the Hudson's Bay Company, in consequence of their people having introduced spirits amongst them, he says: "Through this channel all their trade is carried on with the Russians *and not with the Company*, in whose territory they reside. The reason they assigned for not doing so when questioned was, that some of the Indians had been killed by fire-water (spirits), which some traders had given them to drink, and they feared they might be treated in the same way. This statement is given as nearly as possible in the words in which it was uttered; and, if such a practice exist, it is reprehensible in the highest degree."

At page 163, allusion is again made to the introduction of spirits, and he states: "This was the second time we had heard a similar story, since entering the Hudson's Bay Company's territories," At page 177, speaking of another tribe they met, he says: "They repeated the accusation of the fire-water having been given in barter, and its fatal results. On enquiring as to the value of a Silver Fox Skin, and the amount it realised in barter, they confirmed a story we had heard from the women the day previous, that for three of those precious Skins, they had got from the traders cooking utensils, which we estimated at eight shillings and sixpence.* I may mention

* On enquiry, it appears that the Hudson's Bay Company have two Public Sales of Furs in London every year, during the Spring and Autumn months, and at their Sale last March they sold 909 Black or Silver Fox Skins, at an average price of £17 2s. 1d.; some of them brought as high as £49 10s. each. Assuming, therefore, that Dr. Armstrong's account is correct; at that Sale they obtained £51 6s. 3d. for some trumpery cooking utensils, which only cost them 8s. 6d.—this is a profit of 11,973½ per cent., or nearly 120 times more than the first cost. The total amount of that Sale alone, came to fully £242,900. This statement the Company cannot deny.

that the Skin of the Silver Fox is one of the most valuable Furs, and at the annual sale of the Hudson's Bay Company, varies in price, sometimes bringing as high as twenty-five or thirty guineas, so that an idea of their profits may be formed when we consider the amount of their original cost. How much the condition of these poor creatures might be improved under the influence of *free trade*."

At page 198, speaking of the Esquimaux westward of the Mackenzie River, he says—"I trust the day is not far distant when the light of civilisation will dawn upon this poor, benighted, but intelligent race of beings; for it is deplorable to think that there exists in the Queen's dominions people, so utterly neglected as they have been, without an effort having ever been made by the rulers of their land (Hudson's Bay Company) to ameliorate their condition, or remove them from a state of heathen darkness. But where monopoly exists, progress is arrested; and it is to be hoped the wisdom of our legislature will, ere long, destroy the one and promote the other, and thus develop the resources of their country to the permanent advancement and happiness of its inhabitants."

At page 341, he continues—"It is quite deplorable to think of so fine a race as they were represented to be, being so utterly neglected, and existing in a state of such abject heathenism; more particularly when we find the southern boundary of their country within twenty-five miles of the Northern limit of the extensive territories of that Company (Hudson's Bay), who obtained, and still hold, a charter granted to them, *that they might be the means of promoting commerce and advancing civilization amongst these wild, but interesting people*. How far they have succeeded in the former, they probably can tell; but how they have neglected the latter, we have seen."

Now, after what has been stated of some of the proceedings of this Company, what is the result?—Finding their plea for a renewal of the Charter untenable, they now talk of compensation!—Compensation for what?—Is it for allowing them the undisturbed possession of a Charter that was not only illegal from the first, but the conditions of which

they have violated up to the present time? Is it to reward their Governor-in-chief for indecently falsifying himself before the Senators of his Country? Is it for jeopardising the character of a Colonial Minister, by inducing him to make grants, that were derogatory to the interests of his Sovereign and his Country? Is it for entailing misery and destruction upon thousands throughout the country, which is withering under its curse? Is it for shutting up the earth from the knowledge of man, and man from the knowledge of God? Is it for starving the poor Natives and then never deviating from what is stated to be their "*invariable rule of avenging the murder by Indians of any of their servants. Blood for blood without trial of any kind?*" Is it for forcing whole tribes of benighted British subjects (*for so they are*), by famine, to cannibalism, and eventually to destruction?

England had better pause, before she entertains the renewal of such a Charter, or grants compensation for Blood.

There are many to whom even the name of the Hudson's Bay Company is scarcely known, much less its proceedings. The management of their affairs is inscrutable, for they never publish any accounts, and refuse to give to their proprietary any information—it is like a commercial tomb closed with the key of death to all, except a favored few. It is, in fact, a monopoly as injurious as it is unjust—its councils are unfathomable and its secrets unknown. With all the assumption of a self constituted authority, it has defied Parliamentary interference and Public scrutiny—it oppresses for power and demoralizes for gain—its revenues are acquired in secret and it distributes in silence.

The late debates in the House of Commons on the renewal of the Charter to the Company, which expires in 1859, call forth the serious reflection of every right thinking man. Without much political sagacity, or any extraordinary depth of observation, the mind was led to a foregone conclusion on the part of Government; and though we are bound to give credit to the assertion of Mr. Labouchere that such was not the case, yet it was difficult to comprehend the lukewarmness of

Government on a question of such vital importance to the nation, both as regards the loss or retention of those immense territories, and also as regards the future well-being of thousands yet unborn. If no other plea than that of humanity were urged, surely the cries of an oppressed race are sufficient to arouse the sympathies of Christianity.

The time, however, has now arrived, when the nation expects the Commons of England will not any longer permit Power to thwart Justice. The people of England demand the restitution of their possessions, and the right of maintaining them.

ANDREW FREEPORT.

LONDON, 18TH MAY, 1867.

Subsequently to the above being placed in the hands of the printer, a curious document has been sent to me, which, my informant says, has just been issued, as customary, from the Hudson's Bay Company's House in the City, to those persons who are in the habit of buying their Furs. It shews the number of each kind of Skins the Company expects from Vancouver's Island this year, (to be sold in their Public Sale next Autumn) and at the estimated value given me, the total amount appears to be upwards of £44,500, supposing they bring the same prices at which they sold last Autumn, as shewn below.

Does Lord Grey call a grant that produces £44,500 a year for one article, nothing?—If Furs to such an amount can be obtained, how much more may be reasonably expected from other articles produced there?—Is it nothing to deprive the Nation of all right of trading there? The value of such nothings is very important, in a national point of view.

IMPORTATION FROM VANCOUVER'S ISLAND,

Expected 1857.

	Value last			Value last	
	Skins	Autumn.		Skins	Autumn.
Beaver	15,500.....	9/8 each	Mink	18,870.....	4/5 each
Badger	95.....	1/8 „	Musquash	13,450.....	11½d „
Bear	4050.....	34/ „	Otter	2178.....	7/9 „
Fisher	615.....	28/8 „	„ sea.....	178.....	373/7 „
Fox silver	105.....	168/5 „	Raccoon.....	1470.....	2/7 „
„ cross	358.....	46/2 „	Seal, Hair	7780.....	3/11 „
„ red	326.....	11/ „	Wolf	662.....	5/8 „
Lynx and cat... ..	4760.....	10/8 „	Wolverin	285.....	12/6 „
Marten	27,400.....	13/11 „			